

REMARKS

Claims 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 have been amended to more clearly define the present invention and the title has been amended to more closely reflect the claimed subject matter. The amendments herein present rejected claim(s) in better form for consideration on appeal. Applicants submit the amendment does not add new matter to the current Application.

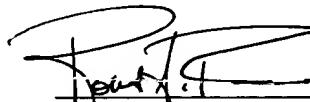
Applicants respectfully submit that claim 2 is not indefinite under 35 U.S.C. § 112. Claim 2 has been amended to include a limitation specifying that the copper content of the uppermost interconnect level is at least 90 atomic percent. Support for this limitation can be found on page 7, lines 19-21 of the current specification.

Applicants submit that claim 1 is not anticipated under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) by U.S. Patent No. 5,149,674 (herein referred to as Freeman). The Office Action states that Applicants have not established a meaning for the term “passivation layer” to exclude a characterization of Freeman’s dielectric layer 19. Applicants have accordingly amended claim 1 to further clarify that Applicants’ passivation layer is formed over the uppermost interconnect level (which includes an interconnect portion and a bond pad) and more specifically to clarify that the support structures are formed over the *uppermost* surface of the bond pad. This is in contrast to Freeman, which teaches that the structures, formed in dielectric layers 14 and 19 as a consequence of the formation of vias 17 and 22, respectively, are formed *below* the uppermost surface of the bond pad. Freeman teaches that the passivation layer above the uppermost surface of the bond pad includes a single rectangular opening (column 5, lines 30-35). Freeman does not teach a discontinuous opening or multiple openings (either of which which would inherently be formed by the presence of the support structures) and arguably teaches away from the present invention by specifying that only a single opening is formed. Freeman therefore cannot anticipate claim 1.

Applicants believe they have addressed the anticipation rejection with respect to claim 1 and respectfully submit that it is currently distinguishable over Freeman. Applicants further submit that dependent claims 2-6 and 8-11, which depend either directly or indirectly from claim 1, should be allowable for at least those reasons that make claim 1 is allowable.

Applicants, believing that they have addressed the Office Action's rejections, respectfully request allowance of the pending claims or, in the alternative, allowance of the present amendment placing the claims in better form for consideration on appeal. Please feel free to contact me at the number below if there are any issues regarding this amendment or the current Application.

Respectfully submitted,



3-18-01

Date

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